
Best Practice Fact Sheet – Addressing Major Barriers

VERMONT’S REACH UP/VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PARTNERSHIP (RU/VR)

Program

Description:	DVR staff provides disabled TANF clients with case management, assessment, specialized employment activities and SSI facilitation. Once accepted into the program, services typically last 6 to 24 months before the client becomes employed and self-sufficient.
Target Population:	TANF clients with “hidden disabilities” (severe learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and mental health or substance abuse related disabilities), multiple barriers and limited life skills
Goal:	Find and keep work
Caseload Data:	The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor also acts as the Reach Up (RU) TANF case manager and has a 40-client caseload (compared to the normal RU caseload of 50-60 and the normal VR caseload of 100-130). SFY 2006: 1,218 clients served (average 500 per month) of which approximately 1/3 clients were pursuing SSI. In June 2007, 509 clients were on the specialized caseload and 92 were on the waiting list.
Cost:	No published data. (Reach Up is sending reports.) The TANF agency contracts with VR agency to pay for the hybrid RU/VR case manager, SSI assistant and employment specialist positions. VR funds pay for assessments, medical evidence, assistive devices, job training/coaching, supported work and services. TANF funds pay for support services and child care.
Evidence:	Mathematica briefs – descriptive output studies
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Assessment:	Screened by the Reach Up TANF case manager; In-depth psychosocial assessment and, for those accepted into the program, a vocational assessment by the hybrid RU/VR case manager.
Description of Services:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vermont’s Reach Up TANF program helps families with children by providing cash assistance for basic needs and services that support work and self-sufficiency. Reach Up offers case management; cash assistance; and support services.• The Reach Up/Vocational Rehabilitation Partnership links the services of Reach Up (RU), the state’s TANF program and its Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program to provide specialized employment services to TANF clients with disabilities. The partnership began in 2001 and continues to this day.• According to the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workforce Investment and Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities report, in 9 of the 12 initial pilot sites the hybrid RU/VR case manager was co-located with the RU TANF staff.• RU TANF case manager screens all TANF clients and uses a collaborative process to refer those with evidence of a disability and a desire to work to a hybrid RU/VR case manager.	

- The hybrid RU/VR case manager works only with TANF clients, acts as the TANF case manager and is co-located with TANF staff to facilitate communication/coordination and provide some cross training.
- When there is a RU/VR waiting list, the hybrid RU/VR case manager provides interim guidance on strategies and services to use until space becomes available. Clients with less severe disabilities or services needs may stay with the RU case manager and receive regular VR services.
- The hybrid RU/VR case manager begins with an in-depth psychosocial assessment to understand the client's disability, rank its severity (which determines the client's priority order for services) and its impact on the person's ability to function. This information will be helpful in identifying and meeting the client's needs, even if the client isn't accepted into RU/VR program.
- Clients accepted into RU/VR program receive a several hour vocational assessment (often spread over several appointments) to determine occupational likes and dislikes, aptitudes, work style and preferences, learning style, work habits and skills, vocational skills and functional or life skills. May also include intelligence testing and assessment of the client's ability to read, write and do math.
- The vocational assessment is used to develop a vocational plan that evaluates the need for assistive technology or accommodations and the client's ability to engage in informed choice and decision making.
- The hybrid RU/VR case manager is supported by an SSI assistant who provides SSI facilitation and by an RU/VR employment specialist to provide job search, trial work, work experience, job coaching and some subsidized work.
- Initially, program supports ended once the client found employment and exited TANF. Now, the regular VR program continues services once the client obtains employment, including up to 12 months job retention services.

Eligibility:

Must qualify for VR services (i.e., documented disability and a desire to become employed) and then wait for an opening in the RU/VR program. Those who don't qualify may receive one-time services.

Findings:

- 25% of cases pursue SSI and 94% of these are ultimately approved, although it may take 18 months.
- Increased employment per published data (Vermont is sending reports)

Implications for Policymakers and Program Developers to Consider:

- Assessments identify clients who need specialized services to progress, may reduce sanctions for failure to participate (as persons may appear non-compliant but actually be unable to complete their required activities), identify unknown treatment needs and provide detailed information to guide employment planning and decision-making.
- Mathematica noted that it may be challenging for states to fund in-depth assessments and there may be some staff resistance to adopting new screening and assessment processes or difficulties training TANF staff in who to refer.
- Unlike assessments that are primarily used to identify a disability, specialized vocational assessments are used to help persons with a disability establish realistic vocational goals and a plan to achieve them.
- Well-developed TANF/VR partnerships provide access to highly-skilled and trained staff, specialized vocational assessments and specialized resources. Potential challenges include cultural differences between agencies stemming from the different target populations and goals set by the federal government for their respective programs, gaps in staff knowledge and skills, waiting lists for VR services and facilitating cross-agency communication. For example, VR may not be accustomed to working with low-income clients and TANF staff may need training to identify clients with hidden disabilities.
- TANF and VR partnerships benefit from a formal agreement on specialized roles and responsibilities and clearly defined performance standards that measure progress towards a common goal. The RU/VR program measures success based on the number of rehabilitations, client participation and duration of services.

Resources:

Vermont's Reach Up/Vocational Rehabilitation program was recommended by Doctor Donna Pavetti, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Information was also provided by Paul Dragon, Director of Reach Up (1-800-479-6151); www.vocrehab.vermont.gov

["Conducting In-Depth Assessments"](#) Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (February 2008)

["Creating TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Partnerships"](#) Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (February 2008)

["The Vermont Vocational Rehabilitation/Reach Up Pilot Program: Addressing the Employment Needs of Welfare Recipients with Disabilities"](#) Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workforce Investment and Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities

["Assisting TANF Recipients Living with Disabilities to Obtain and Maintain Employment: Final Report"](#) Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (February 2008)